

R 150747Z JAN 09
FM AMEMBASSY DHAKA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8134

UNCLAS DHAKA 000061

DEPT FOR DS/OSAC, DS/IP/NEA-SCA, DS/TIA/ITA, DS/TIA/CC

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ASEC](#) [AMGT](#) [APER](#)

SUBJECT: DHAKA ANNUAL OVERSEAS SECURITY ADVISORY COUNCIL
(OSAC) CRIME AND SAFETY REPORT

REF: 08 STATE 132056

1. (U) Please find the following crime/safety information for Bangladesh:

I. Overall Crime and Safety Situation:

In 2008 police reported an increase in violent crimes involving the local population over 2007 levels. Crimes of opportunity remained prevalent against Western targets, particularly those involving public transportation. Many of these types of crimes were perpetrated with the use of knives, small firearms, or an incapacitating agent to subdue the victim.

Urban crime can be organized or opportunistic, conducted by individuals or groups, and commonly encompasses fraud, theft (larceny, pick pocketing, snatch-and-grab), robbery (armed and unarmed), carjacking, rape, assault, and burglary (home and auto). Incidences of crime and levels of violence are higher in low-income residential and congested commercial areas. Domestic crimes against women and children (sexual assault and acid burning), organized trafficking in persons, illegal drugs and firearms are major concerns. These organized criminal acts are far less common in foreign or expatriate communities.

All metropolitan neighborhoods experience frequent burglaries. The Embassy receives numerous reports each year of home break-ins. These incidents often involve locally hired personal guards "on the inside." The Embassy recommends using reputable guard companies and alarm systems as well as employing common sense, such as locking doors, for home security. Homes left unprotected tend to be quickly discovered and targeted by burglars.

Major hotels in Dhaka employ their own private security personnel. While no heinous crimes have been reported at any major hotel, theft by hotel employees is a routine problem. These incidents tend to occur when the hotel room is unoccupied. Hotel management at these hotels have acted quickly to investigate or fire those responsible or under suspicion. There is not, however, always a resolution. These thefts can easily be averted by locking up all valuables.

Americans traveling in Bangladesh should always maintain a low profile and recognize they may be potential targets for crime or terrorism. They should minimize vulnerability while driving vehicles anywhere in Bangladesh by following safe driving practices (defensive driving, locking doors, rolling up windows, etc).

The crime and safety situation in rural areas of Bangladesh mirrors that of the rest of the country. Reports of rural crime or violence against Americans or other foreigners are rare. In the past, there have been isolated reports of robberies on chartered intercity passenger buses as well as larcenies and pick pocketing on crowded trains. According to the police, reported incidents of crime against persons and property in rural areas are far fewer than in cities. Americans traveling in rural areas of Bangladesh should maintain a heightened state of awareness, recognize they may be potential targets for crime or terrorism, remain alert to

their surroundings, and avoid high-risk areas, including large gatherings and political demonstrations.

Traffic accidents, both urban and rural, result in countless fatalities and injuries in Bangladesh every year. Pedestrians, bicycle rickshaws, baby taxis, trucks, buses and livestock congest traffic patterns in most urban centers. Traffic accidents involving pedestrians and light weight vehicles (rickshaws and baby taxis) immediately draw crowds. Crowds are unpredictable and have the potential to become violent. Americans driving in Bangladesh should be alert to road conditions and their surroundings. Know the locations of police stations, and drive defensively at all times. Rural driving conditions on the roadways between urban centers can be treacherous. Large passenger buses and trucks travel at break-neck speeds on narrow, poorly maintained rural roadways shared by pedestrians, rickshaws, baby taxis and livestock. Police patrols are infrequent, and emergency medical services are very limited. Americans driving on rural roadways should be alert to road conditions and their surroundings, keep their fuel tanks full and drive defensively at all times. Many inland waterways lack bridges so travelers must use ferries. Ferries in Bangladesh are poorly maintained, often overloaded, and operators do not have life-safety or water rescue equipment.

II. Political Violence:

National Parliamentary Elections were held by the Caretaker Government on December 29, 2008 after a nearly two year long "State of Emergency." Under the State of Emergency, political demonstrations were banned. The 2008 calendar year saw significantly few demonstrations and little political violence. Campaign rallies and voting in December were considered by all accounts to be the most peaceful in Bangladesh's history. However, the Department of State continues to rate the threat of political violence as "high" until a determination can be made that the decrease in violence is a lasting change and not simply a product of the now lifted State of Emergency. Americans should be aware that historically, political rallies are often violent and targeted by attackers.

Historically, hartals (country-wide strikes), public demonstrations and blockades characterize political confrontation in Bangladesh. Hartals normally result in the virtual shutdown of all motorized transportation and commerce. They always have the potential for violence and significant collateral damage (store fronts, vehicles, street vendors and pedestrians). In Bangladesh, protesters use physical force, bats, rocks, guns, and small explosive devices during confrontations. Police respond using batons, rubber bullets, tear gas, live ammunition, water cannons, and other riot control equipment when confronting protesters. Political confrontations frequently result in injuries and occasional deaths. Americans should always maintain a low profile, avoid marches and demonstrations, and during hartal days, avoid all unnecessary motorized travel.

Demonstrations are especially common on Fridays following prayers at local mosques. The United States is often the target of protests outside the Baitul Makarram National Mosque. Police are good at containing the vast majority of these demonstrations to the immediate area surrounding the mosque.

American citizens in Bangladesh are urged to carefully consider the security risks when deciding whether to attend large public gatherings. Bombings in public places have occurred from time to time. In recent years, there have been grenade attacks at political rallies which have resulted in casualties. These attacks and bombings reinforce continual Embassy warnings about the possibility of violence in public places where large crowds gather.

Global and regional terrorist threats remain a cause for concern in Bangladesh. Over the years global terrorist activity has steadily increased against U.S. interests and

citizens living and working abroad. Enhanced U.S. government overseas security programs have made terrorist attacks on government facilities and senior government officials more difficult. These programs have, by their effectiveness, forced terrorists to seek "softer targets." Americans in Bangladesh should realize they are potential targets for terrorism and take practical measures to protect themselves and their families. Awareness of the local threat, elimination of predictable travel and lifestyle routines, and security consciousness at home and at the office will reduce vulnerability.

In Bangladesh, the government has enjoyed success in combating the banned Islamic extremist group Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB). While there were no significant terrorist attacks in 2008, reports in the press about police raids and intelligence services operations against JMB hideouts, bomb making facilities and gatherings serve as a clear reminder that the threat has not been eliminated. There were several high profile arrests in the period leading up to national elections. The United States' declaration of Harakat ul Jihadi Islami-Bangladesh (HUJI-B) a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) highlights U.S. concerns over other terrorist groups active in the region. HUJI-B has been held responsible for attacks against local political figures, journalists, and diplomats as well as implicated in attacks in India.

III. Post-Specific Concerns:

Annual flooding in Bangladesh can be a serious problem. The drainage systems on many roads are inadequate and stagnant water is a regular feature during the monsoon season. Generally the torrential monsoon rains have a significant impact on traveling in the country both in terms of air travel and road travel.

In addition to seasonal monsoons, Bangladesh is subject to tropical cyclones. While early warning systems have become more effective, these storms continue to wreak devastation on the nation's infrastructure causing significant economic loss. Tropical Cyclone Sidr in November 2007 caused billions of dollars of damage to the country and well more than 3000 deaths. Bangladesh continues to struggle to fully recover from this disaster.

Bangladesh lies on a fault line. It has not had a serious earthquake since 1950. It is impossible to predict how the country would be affected by a seismic event in the future although the infrastructure limitations would impact recovery.

Kidnappings for ransom are not a major problem in Bangladesh. Frequently, however, the consular section handles reports of American citizens being held "hostage" by family members related to marriage disputes.

Drug use and abuse is growing and crosses all social strata. Heroin, marijuana, amphetamines, and injectable drugs are sold on the street. The sale and use of heroin and other narcotics in Dhaka plays an important role in Dhaka's overall crime profile. A 6 dollar-a-day habit is very expensive so addicts from low-income areas must steal or commit other crimes to survive (the average monthly wage in Dhaka is less than 60 USD per month). Heroin can be purchased easily from local distribution houses/shacks. In addition, bicycle and motorized rickshaw drivers sell heroin openly on the street. Speed, tidgesic or buprenorphine (injectable drug), and pethidine (morphine) are also available for a price. Finally, phensydil (codeine) is widely available and often a "drug" of choice both in urban and rural areas. Marijuana is widely used by college students and is inexpensive. It is cultivated in the western part of the country and readily available from drug dealers.

IV. Police Response:

Local neighborhood police stations often lack adequate resources, including personnel, vehicles, record/case

management equipment and supplies, IT technology, radios and telephones, and emergency response capabilities. Despite these limitations, police are responsive to Embassy requests for assistance.

Before police investigate a crime, victims must first file a General Diary at the local police station that has jurisdiction in the area where the crime was committed. Most constable-level police personnel do not speak English. Americans who are victims of crime while visiting Bangladesh should report incidents to the U.S. Embassy's American Citizen Services (ACS) consular representative. Americans who are arrested or detained in Bangladesh should also contact the U.S. Embassy ACS consular representative for assistance.

From any phone in Bangladesh, the numbers 999 can be dialed for immediate police assistance.

IV. Medical Emergencies:

Health problems are prevalent. In particular, gastro-intestinal problems are common. Visitors must exercise care in what they eat and drink; food diseases are common. All tap water should be presumed to be contaminated, even in hotels. Visitors are advised to drink bottled/boiled water and eat only fruits and vegetables that have been cooked and peeled. Undercooked meat should be avoided.

Travelers should also avoid eating uncooked dairy products and food sold on the streets. Visitors who take medication on a regular basis should bring enough for the duration of their visit. It is not always possible to find equivalents for American prescriptions on the local market. While there are several notable exceptions, local medical facilities do not meet U.S. standards.

Most large urban centers in Bangladesh have medical facilities (state-sponsored, NGO, and private) but they are substandard and ill equipped in comparison to equivalent U.S. facilities. Exceptions in Dhaka include Apollo, Square and United Hospitals. While still new, all indications are that minor needs can easily be treated at these facilities. American standard emergency services, e.g., ambulance, fire/paramedic rescue and police, do not exist. Emergency medical response capabilities are limited and where ambulances are available, they are undependable, usually in poor running condition, and lack rudimentary emergency medical equipment.

VI. Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim:

Criminal scams are common on various forms of public transportation. In particular, passengers in rickshaws are often targeted by criminal elements for muggings. Baby taxis and regular taxis are often partners with criminal groups. The driver takes the passenger down a predetermined street or intersection where others enter the vehicle and, with the use of a weapon, proceed to rob the passenger while the driver departs to an out-of-the-way alley. The passenger has a caustic agent smeared in his eyes before being dumped disoriented in the road.

In general, Americans should be aware of their surroundings at all times, avoid predictable behavior, crowds and/or large public gatherings, marches, and demonstrations. Sensitive or personal matters should not be discussed over local telephone lines. Americans should avoid carrying large sums of money, wearing expensive jewelry or walking alone at night. Valuables should be stored in hotel safety deposit boxes and should not be left unattended in hotel rooms.

VII. Embassy Contacts:

Embassy Operator: 880(2)885-5500.

Regional Security Office: 880(2)885-5500, ext. 2228.

Consular Affairs (ACS): 880(2)885-5500, ext. 2602.
Political/Economic Office: 880(2)885-5500, ext. 2151.
Marine Post One: 880(2)885-5500, ext. 2252.

VIII. OSAC Country Council:

The Dhaka OSAC country council is domiciled in Dhaka and meets approximately every three months or more regularly as needed. Please contact the Regional Security Office at 880(2)885-5500, ext. 2228 for more information.

MORIARTY